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METHUEN'S ENGLISH CLASSICS

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# SONGS OF INNOCENCE AND OF EXPERIENCE

*Showing the Two Contrary States of the Human Soul*

BY

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WITH A FRONTISPIECE



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## PREFACE

THE text of this edition is based on a facsimile of *Songs of Innocence* published by Frederick Hollyer, London, 1923, and on a facsimile of *The Songs of Innocence and of Experience*, edited by Edwin J. Ellis, and published by Bernard Quaritch, London, 1893. For the convenience of the student I have retained the satisfactory order of Dr. Sampson's Oxford edition of Blake. Blake's punctuation was unsatisfactory, and his use of capital letters was not consistent. My punctuation and use of capitals differ slightly from Dr. Sampson, and I have followed Ellis's facsimile in reading 'man' (Sampson : *men*) in "Earth's Answer," line 11.

I have to thank Sir Michael Sadler, Master of University College, Oxford, for lending me his copy of Ellis's Facsimile of the *Songs of Innocence and of Experience*, and for supplying most valuable information concerning the Charity Schools and their annual "Assembly," much of which is incorporated in my note on this poem. I desire also to acknowledge my constant indebtedness to Dr. Sampson's excellent text of Blake, from which I have differed only after consideration, and to his textual notes which I have found most valuable.



**SONGS OF INNOCENCE AND  
OF EXPERIENCE**



# INTRODUCTION

## I

*put this  
start!!!*

THE *Songs of Innocence and of Experience* contain some of the most charming lyrics ever written in English. The childlike simplicity and trust of the *Songs of Innocence* is unique. Blake was always an impulsive child, who wandered the farther from conventional reason, the older he grew. His imagination frequently symbolized abstract moral truth as he conceived it. There is little realistic observation of the visible world around us. Blake rejected common sense, and believed that the material world is unreal. His own age, the age of Cowper, Burns, Wordsworth, and Coleridge, scarcely knew of his existence. Those who knew him regarded him as a lunatic, as no doubt he was, according to their standard of common sense. Southey "held him for a decided madman," for Blake had shown him in 1811 "a perfectly mad poem called *Jerusalem*," in which "Oxford Street is in Jerusalem." Wordsworth, to whom Crabb Robinson read some of Blake's poems first in 1812, was pleased with Blake's poetry, but considered it "undoubtedly the production of insane genius"; but, he added, "there is something in the madness of this man that interests me more than the sanity of Lord Byron or Walter Scott."

Bernard Barton, Lamb's Quaker friend, evidently doubted Blake's very existence; for Lamb, writing in May 1824, replied: "Blake is a real name, I assure you,

and a most extraordinary man, if he still be living. . . . He paints in water-colours, marvellous strange pictures, visions of his brain, which he asserts that he has seen. They have great merit. . . . His poems have been sold hitherto only in manuscript. I never read them, but a friend at my desire procured the Sweep Song. There is one to a Tiger, which I have heard recited, beginning

“Tyger, Tyger, burning bright  
Thro' the desarts of the night,”

which is glorious. But alas! I have not the book, for the man is flown, whither I know not,—to Hades, or a Mad House. But I must look on him as one of the most extraordinary persons of the age.” It was not until the middle of the nineteenth century that Rossetti and Swinburne made Blake famous.

Lamb's allusion to Blake's poems, as having been “sold hitherto only in manuscript,” refers to Blake's artistic mode of publication. He was an engraver by profession, and an artist who, like Flaxman, loved firm, clear outline. Only his first volume of poems, *Poetical Sketches* (1783), was printed and published by a bookseller in the ordinary way. Some poems, it is true, exist in manuscript copies, and one, *The French Revolution* (1791) was printed by Blake's publisher-friend J. Johnson,—or rather Book I was printed, though it is doubtful whether it was published; but Blake's usual method of publication, the means by which the *Songs of Innocence* and the *Songs of Experience* first saw the light, was an artistic process which he invented himself and named “illuminated printing.” He wrote on copper plates the text of his poems in reverse, and embellished each page with pictorial decorations. The text of his poems is neatly written, the letters being sometimes separate, sometimes joined, in a script which resembles



## INTRODUCTION

roman and sometimes italic type. It is likely that he wrote and drew in some acid-resisting ink, such as engraver's varnish, and then reduced the surface of the rest of the plate by immersion in a bath of aquafortis until the text and design stood out in relief, like a stereotype. The plate was dried, and inked; and then from the inked plate an impress was made on a sheet of paper which became one page of the volume in preparation. The text of the *Songs* is in red, and the size of the plates used was about five inches by three. After printing, the pages were coloured by the artist and his wife in delicate water-colours,—so that each copy of Blake's *Songs* has its own individuality,—and were then bound in a slim volume by Mrs. Blake. As the process was laborious and necessarily slow, the volumes were produced for each client as required, and few have survived. Only about twenty copies of the original *Songs of Innocence and of Experience* are in existence.

### II

(The *Songs of Innocence*, engraved first in 1789, are a series of poems for children, and it has been suggested that the notion of writing such a volume came to Blake from the desire expressed in Dr. Watt's preface to his *Divine and Moral Songs for Children* that "some happy and condescending genius would undertake for the use of children, and perform much better," some more songs for children like his. At the end of the eighteenth century philosophic minds were much interested in the education of children, and an attempt was made to provide such verse and fiction as should develop the imagination and moral feelings, as the *Moral Tales* of Maria Edgeworth, and the children's poems of Mrs. Barbauld and of Charles and Mary Lamb remind us.) Blake was one of the pioneers

## INTRODUCTION

of this sort of literature. In the *Songs of Innocence* he expressed in perfectly simple and yet golden diction the happiness and innocence of a child's first thoughts about life. Blake seems to become a child living in a world of happiness, beauty, and love; and when he is not a child he is a loving, tender mother. He seems to have believed at that time that the sunshine of love is so radiant that human suffering is only temporary and fleeting. Blake's *Songs of Innocence* are the songs of an imaginative and serious child. They are the divine voice of childhood unchallenged by the test and the doubts of experience,—

“ those obstinate questionings  
Of sense and outward things,  
Fallings from us, vanishings;  
Blank misgivings of a Creature  
Moving about in worlds not realised.”

It is the hardest thing in the world to write good poetry for children, and much of what in our times passes as poetry for children is childish, rather than childlike. In Blake's age they went to the other extreme and taught children always to be good. Most of the children's books of his times are intolerably priggish,—even the *Original Stories* of his revolutionary and highbrow friend, Mary Wollstonecraft. Blake is never directly and offensively didactic, but his influence is a moral influence because it radiates from the simple trust of a child. Only a man of fundamentally innocent nature could have written the *Songs of Innocence*.

The *Songs of Experience*, engraved first in 1794, are poles asunder from the childlike mind of the *Songs of Innocence*. Some of them were written in intentional contrast, and one can realize the change by comparing the Nurse's Songs, the two Holy Thursdays, the two Chimney Sweepers, and “The Lamb” with “The Tiger.” Between 1789 and

1793 Blake's outlook on life had changed, as the two "visions" composed in the meantime show. *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell* (about 1790) written in prose, is a series of aphorisms and visions which attack orthodoxy and common sense. The seeming world around us is an illusion of our senses, which from their very nature cannot communicate true knowledge. According to this poem all true knowledge is intuitive. Hence intuition and instinct are good and right; but the moral law, with its insistence on the repression of original sin and natural desire, is evil and false. *The French Revolution*, Book I, (1791), a prose poem, is a visionary history of the beginning of the French revolution, which shows Blake's sympathy with the aims of the revolutionists. Blake associated with the British revolutionists,—Dr. Price, William Godwin, Tom Paine, Holcroft, and others,—at the house of Johnson the publisher during the years 1791-2. He became an extreme individualist, self-sufficing and self-satisfied. He regarded natural impulse, which he called "imagination" or "energy," as goodness; and morality and duty as fetters which enchain the soul of mankind that forge<sup>d</sup> them.

The *Songs of Experience* are songs of the wounds and cruelties of civilization, and some are satirical of the "mind-forg'd manacles" of custom and law. These songs, like the *Songs of Innocence*, are an expression of wonder, but it is wonder of a new kind,—amazement that man can accept the open inhumanity of man. Blake is sad, almost bitter, not from the strengthening sorrows which life brings in its train,—for to be bitter about these is to live without learning,—but because experience had taught him that men are blind. According to Blake's opinion, men are ignorant of the true knowledge of the spiritual nature of life, because they prefer reason to the mystic's vision, and law and morality to natural impulse.

## III

It is impossible to study Blake without reference to his peculiar views. He believed in spiritual intuition. He continually told people that his poems were dictated to him by "authors in eternity." Imagination was his name for this kind of poetic inspiration. "Nature has no outlines, but imagination has," he said, meaning, I think, not only that the artist gives form to what he observes, but that the poet or seer,—and to Blake both were the same thing,—sees and outlines a vision of truth which is unperceived by the senses, the mere light of nature. To Blake, poetic imagination was *vision*, and not simply the dreamlike fantasy of fiction. Blake loved "imagination" because it perceives the idea which is the reality, and not the appearance of things which the senses communicate. He hated observation, reason, and science, because the objects observed and reasoned upon were, to him, unreal and illusory. "Man cannot naturally perceive, but through his Natural or Bodily Organs." "Man, by his Reasoning Power, can only compare and judge of what he has already perceiv'd." <sup>1</sup>

He admitted that he was the only man who could see his particular vision of life and the world, but he denied that common sight is valid. He believed that sight is an illusion, and that the phenomenon of the world is unreal, because the five senses are bodily, and therefore imperfect. They give us common sense, it is true, but common sense is a distortion of reality, or only a partial view ;—"Mental things alone are real." Hence, to Blake, belief in the reality of external nature, the visible world, was a kind of atheism, and he called Wordsworth a pagan: "I fear Wordsworth loves Nature, and Nature is the work of the

<sup>1</sup> *There is No Natural Religion*, 1738.

Devil." <sup>1</sup> Real knowledge is attainable only by spiritual vision. But this was not to say that the world does not exist, and Blake saw a divine spark in every manifestation of life. He believed not only in the spiritual nature of the soul of all living beings, but in an intimate connexion between soul and body,—“for that call'd ‘Body’ is a portion of the soul discern’d by the five senses.” The existence of nature and living beings, according to Blake, is dependence on and subsistence in a perpetual creator. As he says in the poem entitled “Auguries of Innocence,”

“If the Sun and Moon should doubt,  
They’d immediately go out.”

Life is a connexion, sustained by the immanence of God. Hence Blake’s doctrine that “Everything that lives is holy,” and to Blake a worm or a fly were by virtue of their spark of divine life as considerable, though not as excellent perhaps, as man himself. And hence it followed that the natural impulses of human life were good, for, do they not spring from God?

Blake thought so much upon the clear and radiant light of heaven that he overlooked the darkness of evil, and the impulses which may spring from the absence of light. He was a mystic. Most people in his lifetime called him mad, and mad he was according to their common-sense standard. He is comprehensible only when he compromised with common sense. He declared that his books were dictated by spirits; yet his greatest poems are those produced not by immediate intuition, but by inspiration followed by critical and rational revision,—“The Tiger,” for instance, as it exists in the Rossetti MS. He declared in a letter written to his faithful patron, Thomas Butts of Fitzroy Square, dated 6 July 1803, that “Allegory addressed to the

<sup>1</sup> *H. C. Robinson’s Diary*, 24 Dec. 1825.

intellectual powers, while it is altogether hidden from the corporeal understanding, is my definition of the most sublime poetry." Yet his greatest poems are not the hidden allegories, but the songs which sing themselves out of the common sense and common feelings of mankind, like "The Lamb," "Infant Joy," "Holy Thursday, I," "The Divine Image," "The Tiger," and "Ah! Sunflower." Blake was a mystic who believed in the spiritual apprehension of truth, either by symbol :

"To see a world in a grain of sand  
And a Heaven in a wild flower,  
Hold infinity in the palm of your hand,  
And eternity in an hour,"

or by vision, as in the amazing verses beginning :

"To my friend Butts I write  
My first vision of light,"

but his eye was the eye of understanding, not of sight. Together with common sense he rejected morality, and acted in theory at least upon natural impulse. Milton sang . "Love virtue, she alone is free." Blake's teaching was : Love freedom, she alone is virtuous.

As a poet, Blake stands beside Gray, Collins, and Burns as one of the great lyrists of a great age. The literary circle of Dr. Johnson was breaking up. Goldsmith of the plum-coloured suit, and the lively Garrick, were dead, but grave Edmund Burke, the fascinating Mrs. Thrale, gallant Sheridan, and Gibbon, the master of the polite style in English prose, were still living ; and, down at Weston, gentle Cowper was struggling with his translation of Homer. And what a wonderful century it was ! The age of taste and reason ! The dayspring of the modern notions of science, progress, and democracy ! The age of colonial expansion and the secession of the United States ! The

age of natural religion and of religious revival ! The age of rhetoric, the age of Chatham, Burke, and Fox, the age of Wesley and Whitfield,—and, all unknown to itself, the age of William Blake ! Blake's unerring feeling for rhythm and the beauty of free variation of pattern, his almost Elizabethan grace and frankness, coupled with his love of clear outline and simplicity of diction, make his songs appreciated by those who too thoughtlessly have almost forgotten his contemporaries. His lyrics are unique. Not only are there no songs like these, for they follow no tradition and they influenced no followers ; but there are few English lyrics as good as the best of them. Blake's songs are a strange heritage from the eighteenth century,—a heritage that Englishmen welcome as a complement of the age, a protest, exaggerated no doubt and ineffectual, but still a protest against that earnest rational and conscientious mentality which has made England with all its glories and all its shames what it is to-day. We shall enjoy them, not only for their historical importance in an age which was proud, and rightly proud, of its genius and its traditions ; but also for their simple and beautiful expression of "two contrary states of the human soul"—childlike faith, and wrestling doubt.

## IV

The Notes which accompany this edition are not strictly speaking " notes " in the common or Shakespearian sense, but are rather a little friendly chat, not quite a commentary, on the *Songs of Innocence and Experience*. If you are interested in Blake, and I am sure that after reading his songs you will be, you will want to read his life. The standard life is Alexander Gilchrist's *Life of Blake* (1863), though it is superseded as far as illustrative reminiscences

are concerned by Arthur Symons's *William Blake* (1907) which contains as a supplement most of the sources of information about Blake. Blake's Letters have been edited by A. G. B. Russell (1906). Crabb Robinson's *Diary* contains many interesting entries dealing with Blake. Selections may be read either in Symons's *William Blake*, or in *Henry Crabb Robinson on Blake, Coleridge, Wordsworth, etc.* edited by Edith J. Morley (1922). The standard edition of Blake's works is that of Dr. John Sampson (Oxford 1905 and 1913). The best criticism of Blake still remains to be written.



**SONGS OF INNOCENCE AND  
OF EXPERIENCE**



# SONGS OF INNOCENCE

## I

### INTRODUCTION

PIPING down the valleys wild,  
Piping songs of pleasant glee,  
On a cloud I saw a child,  
And he laughing said to me :  
  
' Pipe a song about a Lamb ! ' 5  
So I piped with merry cheer.  
' Piper, pipe that song again ; '  
So I piped : he wept to hear.  
  
' Drop thy pipe, thy happy pipe ;  
Sing thy songs of happy cheer : ' 10  
So I sang the same again,  
While he wept with joy to hear.  
  
' Piper, sit thee down and write  
In a book, that all may read.' 15  
So he vanish'd from my sight,  
And I pluck'd a hollow reed,  
  
And I made a rural pen,  
And I stain'd the water clear,  
And I wrote my happy songs  
Every child may joy to hear. 20

## II

## THE ECHOING GREEN

THE Sun does arise,  
And make happy the skies ;  
The merry bells ring  
To welcome the Spring ;  
The skylark and thrush, 5  
The birds of the bush,  
Sing louder around  
To the bells' cheerful sound,  
While our sports shall be seen  
On the Echoing Green. 10

Old John, with white hair,  
Does laugh away care,  
Sitting under the oak,  
Among the old folk.  
They laugh at our play, 15  
And soon they all say :  
' Such, such were the joys  
When we all, girls and boys,  
In our youth-time were seen  
On the Echoing Green.' 20

Till the little ones, weary,  
No more can be merry ;  
The sun does descend,  
And our sports have an end.

Round the laps of their mothers 25  
Many sisters and brothers,  
Like birds in their nest,  
Are ready for rest ;  
And sport no more seen  
On the darkening Green. 30

## III

## THE LAMB

LITTLE Lamb, who made thee ?  
Dost thou know who made thee ?  
Gave thee life, and bid thee feed,  
By the stream and o'er the mead ;  
Gave thee clothing of delight, 5  
Softest clothing, woolly, bright ;  
Gave thee such a tender voice,  
Making all the vales rejoice ?  
Little Lamb, who made thee ?  
Dost thou know who made thee ? 10  
Little Lamb, I'll tell thee,  
Little Lamb, I'll tell thee :  
He is callèd by thy name,  
For He calls Himself a Lamb.  
He is meek, and He is mild ; 15  
He became a little child.  
I a child, and thou a lamb,  
We are callèd by His name.  
Little Lamb, God bless thee !  
Little Lamb, God bless thee ! 20

## IV

## THE SHEPHERD

How sweet is the shepherd's sweet lot !  
 From the morn to the evening he strays ;  
 He shall follow his sheep all the day,  
 And his tongue shall be fillèd with praise.

For he hears the lamb's innocent call, 5  
 And he hears the ewe's tender reply ;  
 He is watchful while they are in peace,  
 For they know when their shepherd is nigh.

## V

## INFANT JOY

' I HAVE no name :  
 I am but two days old.'  
 What shall I call thee ?  
 ' I happy am,  
 Joy is my name.' 5  
 Sweet joy befall thee !

Pretty joy !  
 Sweet joy, but two days old.  
 Sweet joy I call thee :  
 Thou dost smile, 10  
 I sing the while,  
 Sweet joy befall thee !

## VI

## THE LITTLE BLACK BOY

My mother bore me in the southern wild,  
And I am black, but O my soul is white ;  
White as an angel is the English child,  
But I am black, as if bereav'd of light.

My mother taught me underneath a tree, 5  
And, sitting down before the heat of day,  
She took me on her lap and kissèd me,  
And, pointing to the east, began to say :

' Look, on the rising sun, there God does live,  
And gives His light, and gives His heat away ; 10  
And flowers and trees and beasts and men receive  
Comfort in morning, joy in the noonday.

' And we are put on earth a little space,  
That we may learn to bear the beams of love ;  
And these black bodies and this sunburnt face 15  
Is but a cloud, and like a shady grove.

' For when our souls have learn'd the heat to bear,  
The cloud will vanish, we shall hear His voice,  
Saying : " Come out from the grove, My love and care,  
And round My golden tent like lambs rejoice." ' 20

Thus did my mother say, and kissèd me ;  
And thus I say to little English boy.  
When I from black, and he from white cloud free,  
And round the tent of God like lambs we joy,

I'll shade him from the heat, till he can bear  
To lean in joy upon our father's knee ;  
And then I'll stand and stroke his silver hair,  
And be like him, and he will then love me.

25

## VII

## LAUGHING SONG

WHEN the green woods laugh with the voice of joy,  
And the dimpling stream runs laughing by ;  
When the air does laugh with our merry wit,  
And the green hill laughs with the noise of it ;

When the meadows laugh with lively green,  
And the grasshopper laughs in the merry scene ;  
When Mary and Susan and Emily  
With their sweet round mouths sing ' Ha, Ha, He ! '

5

When the painted birds laugh in the shade,  
Where our table with cherries and nuts is spread,  
Come live and be merry, and join with me,  
To sing the sweet chorus of ' Ha, Ha, He ! '

10



## VIII

## SPRING

SOUND the flute !

Now it's mute.

Birds delight

Day and night ;

Nightingale

5

In the dale,

Lark in sky,

Merrily,

Merrily, merrily, to welcome in the year.

Little boy,

10

Full of joy ;

Little girl,

Sweet and small ;

Cock does crow,

So do you ;

15

Merry voice,

Infant noise,

Merrily, merrily, to welcome in the year.

Little lamb,

Here I am ;

20

Come and lick

My white neck ;

Let me pull

Your soft wool ;

Let me kiss

25

Your soft face :

Merrily, merrily, we welcome in the year.

## IX

## A CRADLE SONG

SWEET dreams, form a shade  
 O'er my lovely infant's head ;  
 Sweet dreams of pleasant streams  
 By happy, silent, moony beams.

Sweet sleep, with soft down 5  
 Weave thy brows an infant crown.  
 Sweet sleep, Angel mild,  
 Hover o'er my happy child.

Sweet smiles, in the night  
 Hover over my delight ; 10  
 Sweet smiles, Mother's smiles,  
 All the livelong night beguiles.

Sweet moans, dovelike sighs,  
 Chase not slumber from thy eyes.  
 Sweet moans, sweeter smiles, 15  
 All the dovelike moans beguiles.

Sleep, sleep, happy child,  
 All creation slept and smil'd ;  
 Sleep, sleep, happy sleep,  
 While o'er thee thy mother weep. 20

Sweet babe, in thy face  
 Holy image I can trace.  
 Sweet babe, once like thee,  
 Thy Maker lay and wept for me.

Wept for me, for thee, for all, 25  
 When He was an infant small.  
 Thou His image ever see,  
 Heavenly face that smiles on thee,  
 Smiles on thee, on me, on all ;  
 Who became an infant small. 30  
Infant smiles are His own smiles,  
Heaven and earth to peace beguiles.

## X

## NURSE'S SONG

WHEN the voices of children are heard on the green,  
 And laughing is heard on the hill,  
 My heart is at rest within my breast,  
 And everything else is still.  
 ' Then come home, my children, the sun is gone down, 5  
 And the dews of night arise ;  
 Come, come, leave off play, and let us away,  
 Till the morning appears in the skies.'  
 ' No, no, let us play, for it is yet day,  
 And we cannot go to sleep ; 10  
 Besides, in the sky the little birds fly,  
 And the hills are all cover'd with sheep.'  
 ' Well, well, go and play, till the light fades away,  
 And then go home to bed.'  
 The little ones leaped and shoutèd and laugh'd 15  
 And all the hills echoèd.

## XI

## HOLY THURSDAY

'Twas on a Holy Thursday, their innocent faces clean,  
The children walking two and two, in red and blue and  
green ;  
Grey-headed beadles walk'd before, with wands as white  
as snow,  
Till into the high dome of Paul's they like Thames'  
waters flow.

O what a multitude they seem'd, these flowers of London  
town ! 5  
Seated in companies, they sit with radiance all their  
own.  
The hum of multitudes was there, but multitudes of  
lambs,  
Thousands of little boys and girls raising their innocent  
hands.

Now like a mighty wind they raise to heaven the voice  
of song,  
Or like harmonious thunderings the seats of heaven  
among. 10  
Beneath them sit the agèd men, wise guardians of the  
poor ;  
Then cherish pity, lest you drive an angel from your  
door.

## XII

## THE BLOSSOM

MERRY, merry Sparrow !  
Under leaves so green,  
A happy Blossom  
Sees you, swift as arrow,  
Seek your cradle narrow 5  
Near my Bosom.

Pretty, pretty Robin !  
Under leaves so green,  
A happy Blossom  
Hears you sobbing, sobbing, 10  
Pretty, pretty Robin,  
Near my Bosom.

## XIII

## THE CHIMNEY-SWEEPER

WHEN my mother died, I was very young  
And my father sold me, while yet my tongue  
Could scarcely cry 'weep ! 'weep ! 'weep ! 'weep !'  
So your chimneys I sweep, and in soot I sleep.

There's little Tom Dacre, who cried when his head, 5  
That curl'd like a lamb's back, was shav'd,—so I said  
'Hush, Tom ! never mind it, for when your head's bare  
You know that the soot cannot spoil your white hair.'

And so he was quiet, and that very night,  
 As Tom was a-sleeping, he had such a sight !— 10  
 That thousands of sweepers, Dick, Joe, Ned and Jack,  
 Were all of them lock'd up in coffins of black.

And by came an Angel who had a bright key,  
 And he open'd the coffins and set them all free ;  
 Then down a green plain leaping, laughing, they run, 15  
 And wash in a river, and shine in the Sun.

Then naked and white, all their bags left behind,  
They rise upon clouds and sport in the wind ;  
 And the Angel told Tom, if he'd be a good boy,  
 He'd have God for his father, and never want joy. 20

And so Tom awoke, and we rose in the dark  
 And got, with our bags and our brushes, to work.  
 Tho' the morning was cold, Tom was happy and warm ;  
So if all do their duty, they need not fear harm.

## XIV

## THE DIVINE IMAGE

To Mercy, Pity, Peace, and Love  
 All pray in their distress ;  
 And to these virtues of delight  
 Return their thankfulness.

For Mercy, Pity, Peace, and Love  
 Is God, our Father dear,  
 And Mercy, Pity, Peace, and Love  
 Is Man, His child and care.

For Mercy has a human heart,  
Pity a human face, 10  
And Love, the human form divine,  
And Peace, the human dress.

Then every man, of every clime,  
That prays in his distress,  
Prays to the human form divine,— 15  
Love, Mercy, Pity, Peace.

And all must love the human form,  
In heathen, Turk, or Jew.  
Where Mercy, Love, and Pity dwell,  
There God is dwelling too. 20

## XV

## NIGHT

THE sun descending in the west,  
The evening star does shine ;  
The birds are silent in their nest,  
And I must seek for mine.  
The moon like a flower, 5  
In heaven's high bower,  
With silent delight  
Sits and smiles on the night.

Farewell, green fields and happy groves,  
Where flocks have took delight. 10  
Where lambs have nibbled, silent moves  
The feet of angels bright ;

Unseen they pour blessing,  
And joy without ceasing,  
On each bud and blossom,  
And each sleeping bosom.

15

They look in every thoughtless nest,  
Where birds are cover'd warm ;  
They visit caves of every beast,  
To keep them all from harm.  
If they see any weeping  
That should have been sleeping,  
They pour sleep on their head,  
And sit down by their bed.

20

When wolves and tigers howl for prey,  
They pitying stand and weep,  
Seeking to drive their thirst away,  
And keep them from the sheep ;  
But if they rush dreadful,  
The angels, most heedful,  
Receive each mild spirit,  
New worlds to inherit.

25

30

And there the lion's ruddy eyes  
Shall flow with tears of gold,  
And pitying the tender cries,  
And walking round the fold,  
Saying, ' Wrath, by his meekness,  
And, by his health, sickness  
Is driven away  
From our immortal day.

35

40



' And now beside thee, bleating lamb,  
I can lie down and sleep ;  
Or think on Him who bore thy name,  
Graze after thee and weep.

For, wash'd in life's river, 45  
My bright mane for ever  
Shall shine like the gold  
As I guard o'er the fold.'

## XVI

## A DREAM

ONCE a dream did weave a shade  
O'er my Angel-guarded bed,  
That an Emmet lost its way  
Where on grass methought I lay.

Troubled, 'wilder'd, and forlorn, 5  
Dark, benighted, travel-worn,  
Over many a tangled spray,  
All heart-broke I heard her say :

' O, my children ! do they cry ?  
Do they hear their father sigh ? 10  
Now they look abroad to see,  
Now return and weep for me.'

Pitying, I dropp'd a tear ;  
But I saw a glow-worm near,  
Who replied : ' What wailing wight 15  
Calls the watchman of the night ?

' I am set to light the ground,  
While the beetle goes his round :  
Follow now the beetle's hum ;  
Little wanderer, hie thee home.'

20

## XVII

## ON ANOTHER'S SORROW

CAN I see another's woe,  
And not be in sorrow too ?  
Can I see another's grief,  
And not seek for kind relief ?

Can I see a falling tear,  
And not feel my sorrow's share ?  
Can a father see his child  
Weep, nor be with sorrow fill'd ?

5

Can a mother sit and hear  
An infant groan, an infant fear ?  
No, no ! never can it be !  
Never, never can it be !

10

And can He who smiles on all  
Hear the wren with sorrows small,  
Hear the small bird's grief and care,  
Hear the woes that infants bear,

15

And not sit beside the nest,  
Pouring pity in their breast ;  
And not sit the cradle near,  
Weeping tear on infant's tear ;

20

And not sit both night and day,  
Wiping all our tears away ?  
O, no ! never can it be !  
Never, never can it be !

He doth give His joy to all ; 25  
He becomes an infant small,  
He becomes a man of woe,  
He doth feel the sorrow too.

Think not thou canst sigh a sigh,  
And thy Maker is not by ; 30  
Think not thou canst weep a tear,  
And thy Maker is not near.

O ! He gives to us His joy  
That our grief He may destroy.  
Till our grief is fled and gone 35  
He doth sit by us and moan.

## XVIII

## THE LITTLE BOY LOST

' FATHER ! father ! where are you going ?  
O do not walk so fast.  
Speak, father, speak to your little boy,  
Or else I shall be lost.'

The night was dark, no father was there ; 5  
The child was wet with dew ;  
The mire was deep, and the child did weep,  
And away the vapour flew.

## XIX

## THE LITTLE BOY FOUND

THE little boy lost in the lonely fen,  
Led by the wand'ring light,  
Began to cry ; but God, ever nigh,  
Appear'd like his father in white.

He kissèd the child, and by the hand led,      5  
And to his mother brought,  
Who in sorrow pale, thro' the lonely dale,  
Her little boy weeping sought.

## SONGS OF EXPERIENCE

I

## INTRODUCTION

HEAR the voice of the Bard !  
Who present, past, and future, sees ;  
    Whose ears have heard  
    The Holy Word,  
That walk'd among the ancient trees,      5  
Calling the lapsed soul,  
And weeping in the evening dew ;  
    That might control  
    The starry pole,  
And fallen fallen light renew !      10  
' O Earth, O Earth, return !  
Arise from out the dewy grass ;  
    Night is worn,  
    And the morn  
Rises from the slumberous mass.      15  
' Turn away no more ;  
Why wilt thou turn away ?  
    The starry floor,  
    The wat'ry shore,  
Is giv'n thee till the break of day.'      20

## II

## EARTH'S ANSWER

EARTH rais'd up her head  
 From the darkness dread and drear.  
     Her light fled,—  
     Stony dread !  
 And her locks cover'd with grey despair.   5

' Prison'd on wat'ry shore,  
 Starry Jealousy does keep my den.  
     Cold and hoar,  
     Weeping o'er,  
 I hear the Father of the ancient men.   10

' Selfish Father of man !  
 Cruel, jealous, selfish Fear !  
     Can delight,  
     Chain'd in night,  
 The virgins of youth and morning bear ?   15

' Does spring hide its joy  
 When buds and blossoms grow ?  
     Does the sower  
     Sow by night ?  
 Or the plowman in darkness plow ?   20

' Break this heavy chain  
That does freeze my bones around.  
     Selfish ! vain !  
     Eternal bane !  
 That free Love with bondage bound.'   25

## III

## NURSE'S SONG

WHEN the voices of children are heard on the green,  
And whisp'rings are in the dale,  
The days of my youth rise fresh in my mind,  
My face turns green and pale.

Then come home, my children, the sun is gone down, 5  
And the dews of night arise ;  
Your spring and your day are wasted in play,  
And your winter and night in disguise. *acting*

## IV

## THE FLY

LITTLE Fly,  
Thy summer's play  
My thoughtless hand  
Has brush'd away.

Am not I  
A fly like thee ?  
Or art not thou  
A man like me ?

5

For I dance,  
And drink, and sing,  
Till some blind hand  
Shall brush my wing.

10

If thought is life  
 And strength and breath,  
 And the want  
 Of thought is death ;

*thought = life*  
 ↓  
*"spirit"??* 15

Then am I  
 A happy fly,  
 If I live  
 Or if I die.

20

## V

## THE TIGER

TIGER ! Tiger ! burning bright  
 In the forests of the night,  
 What immortal hand or eye  
 Could frame thy fearful symmetry ?

In what distant deeps or skies  
 Burnt the fire of thine eyes ?  
 On what wings dare He aspire ?  
 What the hand dare seize the fire ?

5

And what shoulder, and what art,  
 Could twist the sinews of thy heart ?  
 And when thy heart began to beat,  
 What dread hand ? and what dread feet ?

10

What the hammer ? what the chain ?  
 In what furnace was thy brain ?  
 What the anvil ? What dread grasp  
 Dare its deadly terrors clasp ?

15



When the stars threw down their spears,  
 And water'd heaven with their tears,  
 Did He smile His work to see ?  
 Did He who made the Lamb make thee ? 20

Tiger ! Tiger ! burning bright  
 In the forests of the night,  
 What immortal hand or eye  
 Dare frame thy fearful symmetry ?

## VI

## THE LITTLE GIRL LOST

*In futurity  
 I prophetic see  
 That the earth from sleep  
 (Grave the sentence deep)*

*Shall arise and seek 5  
 For her Maker meek ;  
 And the desert wild  
 Become a garden mild.*

In the southern clime,  
 Where the summer's prime 10  
 Never fades away,  
 Lovely Lyca lay.

Seven summers old  
 Lovely Lyca told ;  
 She had wander'd long 15  
 Hearing wild birds' song.

' Sweet sleep, come to me  
Underneath this tree.  
Do father, mother, weep ?  
Where can Lyca sleep ?

20

' Lost in desert wild  
Is your little child.  
How can Lyca sleep,  
If her mother weep ?

' If her heart does ache

25

Then let Lyca wake ;  
If my mother sleep,  
Lyca shall not weep.

' Frowning, frowning night  
O'er this desert bright,

30

Let thy moon arise  
While I close my eyes.'

Sleeping Lyca lay  
While the beasts of prey,  
Come from caverns deep,

35

View'd the maid asleep.

The kingly lion stood  
And the virgin view'd,  
Then he gamboll'd round  
O'er the hallow'd ground.

40

Leopards, tigers, play  
Round her as she lay,  
While the lion old  
Bow'd his mane of gold.

And her bosom lick,

45

And upon her neck

From his eyes of flame

Ruby tears there came ;

While the lioness

Loos'd her slender dress,

50

And naked they convey'd

To caves the sleeping maid.

## VII

## THE LITTLE GIRL FOUND

ALL the night in woe

Lyca's parents go

Over valleys deep,

While the deserts weep.

Tired and woe-begone,

5

Hoarse with making moan,

Arm in arm seven days

They trac'd the desert ways.

Seven nights they sleep

Among shadows deep,

10

And dream they see their child

Starv'd in desert wild.

Pale, thro' pathless ways

The fancied image strays

Famish'd, weeping, weak,

15

With hollow piteous shriek.

Rising from unrest,  
The trembling woman prest  
With feet of weary woe :  
She could no further go. 20

In his arms he bore  
Her, arm'd with sorrow sore,  
Till before their way  
A couching lion lay.

Turning back was vain : 25  
Soon his heavy mane  
Bore them to the ground.  
Then he stalk'd around,

Smelling to his prey ;  
But their fears allay 30  
When he licks their hands,  
And silent by them stands.

They look upon his eyes  
Fill'd with deep surprise ;  
And wondering behold 35  
A spirit arm'd in gold.

On his head a crown ;  
On his shoulders down  
Flow'd his golden hair.  
Gone was all their care, 40

' Follow me,' he said,  
' Weep not for the maid ;  
In my palace deep  
Lyca lies asleep.'

Then they followèd 45  
Where the vision led,  
And saw their sleeping child  
Among tigers wild.

---

To this day they dwell  
In a lonely dell ; 50  
Nor fear the wolvish howl  
Nor the lions' growl.

VIII

THE CLOD AND THE PEBBLE

' LOVE seeketh not itself to please,  
Nor for itself hath any care ;  
But for another gives its ease,  
And builds a Heaven in Hell's despair.'

So sung a little Clod of clay, 5  
Trodden with the cattle's feet,  
But a Pebble of the brook  
Warbled out these metres meet :

' Love seeketh only self to please,  
To bind another to its delight, 10  
Joys in another's loss of ease,  
And builds a Hell in Heaven's despite.'

## IX

## THE LITTLE VAGABOND

‘ DEAR mother, dear mother, the church is cold,  
 But the ale-house is healthy and pleasant and warm ;  
 Besides I can tell where I am used well,  
 Such usage in Heaven will never do well.

‘ But if at the church they would give us some ale, 5  
 And a pleasant fire our souls to regale,  
 We’d sing and we’d pray all the livelong day,  
 Nor ever once wish from the church to stray.

‘ Then the parson might preach, and drink, and sing,  
 And we’d be as happy as birds in the spring ; 10  
 And modest dame Lurch, who is always at church,  
 Would not have bandy children, nor fasting, nor birch.

‘ And God, like a father, rejoicing to see  
 His children as pleasant and happy as He,  
 Would have no more quarrel with the devil or the  
     barrel, 15  
 But kiss him, and give him both drink and apparel.’

## X

## HOLY THURSDAY

Is this a holy thing to see  
 In a rich and fruitful land,—

Babes reduc'd to misery,  
 Fed with cold and usurous hand ?

Is that trembling cry a song ? 5

Can it be a song of joy ?  
 And so many children poor ? *licked through paper*  
 It is a land of poverty.

And their sun does never shine,  
 And their fields are bleak and bare, 10  
 And their ways are fill'd with thorns,  
 It is eternal winter there.

For where'er the sun does shine,  
 And where'er the rain does fall,  
 Babe can never hunger there, 15  
 Nor poverty the mind appall.

## XI

## A POISON TREE

I WAS angry with my friend :  
 I told my wrath, my wrath did end.  
 I was angry with my foe :  
 I told it not, my wrath did grow.

And I water'd it in fears, 5  
 Night and morning with my tears ;  
 And I sunnèd it with smiles,  
 And with soft deceitful wiles.

And it grew both day and night,  
 Till it bore an apple bright ; 10  
 And my foe beheld it shine,  
 And he knew that it was mine,

And into my garden stole  
 When the night had veil'd the pole :  
 In the morning glad I see 15  
 My foe outstretch'd beneath the tree.

## XII

## THE ANGEL

I DREAMT a dream ! what can it mean ?  
 And that I was a maiden Queen,  
 Guarded by an Angel mild :  
 Witless woe was ne'er beguil'd !

And I wept both night and day, 5  
 And he wip'd my tears away,  
 And I wept both day and night,  
 And hid from him my heart's delight.

So he took his wings and fled ;  
 Then the morn blush'd rosy red ; 10  
 I dried my tears, and arm'd my fears  
 With ten thousand shields and spears.

Soon my Angel came again :  
 I was arm'd, he came in vain ;  
 For the time of youth was fled, 15  
 And grey hairs were on my head.



## XIII

## THE SICK ROSE

O ROSE, thou art sick !  
The invisible worm,  
That flies in the night,  
In the howling storm,  
Has found out thy bed  
Of crimson joy ;  
And his dark secret love  
Does thy life destroy.

5

## XIV

## TO TIRZAH

WHATE'ER is born of mortal birth  
Must be consumèd with the earth,  
To rise from generation free :  
Then what have I to do with thee ?  
The sexes sprung from shame and pride,  
Blow'd in the morn, in evening died ;  
But Mercy chang'd death into sleep ;  
The sexes rose to work and weep.  
Thou Mother of my mortal part  
With cruelty didst mould my heart,  
And with false self-deceiving tears  
Didst bind my nostrils, eyes, and ears ;

5

10

Didst close my tongue in senseless clay,  
 And me to mortal life betray :  
The death of Jesus set me free :  
Then what have I to do with thee ?

*It is Raised a spiritual Body.*

## XV

## THE VOICE OF THE ANCIENT BARD

YOUTH of delight, come hither,  
 And see the opening morn,  
 Image of truth new-born.  
 Doubt is fled, and clouds of reason,  
 Dark disputes and artful teasing.  
 Folly is an endless maze,  
 Tangled roots perplex her ways.  
 How many have fallen there !  
 They stumble all night over bones of the dead,  
 And feel they know not what but care,  
 And wish to lead others, when they should be led.

## XVI

## MY PRETTY ROSE-TREE

A FLOWER was offer'd to me,  
 Such a flower as May never bore ;  
 But I said ' I've a pretty Rose-tree,'  
 And I passèd the sweet flower o'er.

Then I went to my pretty Rose-tree, 5  
To tend her by day and by night,  
But my Rose turn'd away with jealousy,  
And her thorns were my only delight.

## XVII

## AH, SUN-FLOWER !

AH, Sun-flower ! weary of time,  
Who countest the steps of the Sun ;  
Seeking after that sweet golden clime,  
Where the traveller's journey is done ;

Where the youth pined away with desire, 5  
And the pale virgin shrouded in snow,  
Arise from their graves, and aspire  
Where my Sun-flower wishes to go.

## XVIII

## THE LILY

THE modest Rose puts forth a thorn,  
The humble Sheep a threat'ning horn ;  
While the Lily white shall in love delight,  
Nor a thorn, nor a threat, stain her beauty  
bright.

## XIX

## THE GARDEN OF LOVE

I WENT to the Garden of Love,  
And saw what I never had seen :  
A Chapel was built in the midst,  
Where I used to play on the green.

And the gates of this Chapel were shut, 5  
And ' Thou shalt not ' writ over the door ;  
So I turn'd to the Garden of Love  
That so many sweet flowers bore ;

And I saw it was fillèd with graves,  
And tombstones where flowers should be : 10  
And priests in black gowns were walking their rounds,  
And binding with briars my joys and desires.

## XX

## A LITTLE BOY LOST

' NOUGHT loves another as itself,  
Nor venerates another so,  
Nor is it possible to Thought  
A greater than itself to know :

' And, Father, how can I love you 5  
Or any of my brothers more ?  
I love you like the little bird  
That picks up crumbs around the door.'

The priest sat by and heard the child,  
 In trembling zeal he seiz'd his hair : 10  
 He led him by his little coat,  
 And all admir'd the priestly care.

And standing on the altar high,  
 ' Lo ! what a fiend is here,' said he,  
 ' One who sets reason up for judge 15  
 Of our most holy Mystery.'

The weeping child could not be heard,  
 The weeping parents wept in vain ;  
 They stripp'd him to his little shirt,  
 And bound him in an iron chain ; 20

And burn'd him in a holy place,  
 Where many had been burn'd before :  
 The weeping parents wept in vain.  
 Are such things done on Albion's shore ?

*ms of experience is on England*  
*ms of the words* XXI  
*and realities of civilization*  
 INFANT SORROW

My mother groan'd, my father wept,  
 Into the dangerous world I leapt ;  
 Helpless, naked, piping loud,  
 Like a fiend hid in a cloud.

Struggling in my father's hands, 5  
 Striving against my swaddling-bands,  
 Bound and weary, I thought best  
 To sulk upon my mother's breast.

## XXII

## THE SCHOOLBOY

I LOVE to rise in a summer morn  
When the birds sing on every tree ;  
The distant huntsman winds his horn,  
And the skylark sings with me.  
O ! what sweet company ! 5

But to go to school in a summer morn,  
O ! it drives all joy away ;  
Under a cruel eye outworn,  
The little ones spend the day  
In sighing and dismay. 10

Ah ! then at times I drooping sit,  
And spend many an anxious hour,  
Nor in my book can I take delight,  
Nor sit in learning's bower,  
Worn thro' with the dreary shower. 15

How can the bird that is born for joy  
Sit in a cage and sing ?  
How can a child, when fears annoy,  
But droop his tender wing,  
And forget his youthful spring ? 20

O ! father and mother, if buds are nipp'd  
And blossoms blown away,  
And if the tender plants are stripp'd  
Of their joy in the springing day,  
By sorrow and care's dismay, 25

How shall the summer arise in joy,  
Or the summer fruits appear ?  
Or how shall we gather what griefs destroy,  
Or bless the mellowing year,  
When the blasts of winter appear ? 30

## XXIII

## LONDON

I WANDER thro' each charter'd street,  
Near where the charter'd Thames does flow,  
And mark in every face I meet  
Marks of weakness, marks of woe.

In every cry of every man, 5  
In every infant's cry of fear,  
In every voice, in every ban,  
The mind-forg'd manacles I hear.

How the chimney-sweeper's cry  
Every black'ning church appalls ; 10  
And the hapless soldier's sigh  
Runs in blood down palace walls.

But most thro' midnight streets I hear  
How the youthful harlot's curse  
Blasts the new-born infant's tear, 15  
And blights with plagues the marriage-hearse.

## XXIV

## A LITTLE GIRL LOST

*Can see  
progression  
in terms of  
time  
brings*

*CHILDREN of the future age,  
Reading this indignant page,  
Know that in a former time, —  
Love, sweet Love, was thought a crime !*

In the Age of Gold, 5  
Free from winter's cold,  
Youth and maiden bright  
To the holy light,  
Naked in the sunny beams delight.

Once a youthful pair, 10  
Fill'd with softest care,  
Met in garden bright  
Where the holy light  
Had just remov'd the curtains of the night.

*time* There, in rising day, 15  
On the grass they play :  
Parents were afar,  
Strangers came not near,  
And the maiden soon forgot her fear.

Tired with kisses sweet, 20  
They agree to meet  
When the silent sleep  
Waves o'er heaven's deep,  
And the weary tired wanderers weep.

*substantiates*



To her father white  
 Came the maiden bright ;  
 But his loving look,  
 Like the holy book,

*How shall not* 25

All her tender limbs with terror shook.

' Ona ! pale and weak !

*wonder-  
 @ men's* 30  
*cruelty*

To thy father speak :

O ! the trembling fear,

O ! the dismal care,

That shakes the blossoms of my hoary hair !'

*remember  
 loss of in*

*cannot  
 speak his  
 love*

## XXV

## THE CHIMNEY-SWEEPER

A LITTLE black thing among the snow,  
 Crying 'weep ! weep !' in notes of woe !  
 ' Where are thy father and mother ? say ?'—  
 ' They are both gone up to the church to pray.

' Because I was happy upon the heath,  
 And smil'd among the winter's snow,  
 They clothèd me in the clothes of death,  
 And taught me to sing the notes of woe.

5

' And because I am happy, and dance and sing,  
 They think they have done me no injury,  
 And are gone to praise God and his priest and king,  
 Who make up a heaven of our misery.'

10

## XXVI

## THE HUMAN ABSTRACT

Pity would be no more  
If we did not make somebody poor ;  
And Mercy no more could be  
If all were as happy as we.

And mutual fear brings peace 5  
Till the selfish loves increase ;  
Then Cruelty knits a snare,  
And spreads his baits with care.

He sits down with holy fears,  
And waters the ground with tears ; 10  
Then Humility takes its root  
Underneath his foot.

Soon spreads the dismal shade  
Of Mystery over his head ;  
And the caterpillar and fly 15  
Feed on the Mystery.

And it bears the fruit of Deceit,  
Ruddy and sweet to eat ;  
And the raven his nest has made  
In its thickest shade. 20

The Gods of the earth and sea  
Sought through Nature to find this tree ;  
But their search was all in vain :  
There grows one in the human brain.

## XXVII

## A DIVINE IMAGE

CRUELTY has a human heart,  
And Jealousy a human face ;  
Terror the human form divine,  
And Secrecy the human dress.

The human dress is forgèd iron,  
The human form a fiery forge,  
The human face a furnace seal'd,  
The human heart its hungry gorge.

5



# NOTES

## SONGS OF INNOCENCE

### I. INTRODUCTION.

Blake's inspiration often came to him from his visions, but this poem, I think, is an allegory. It is also a little pastoral. Blake thinks of himself as a shepherd-boy with a pipe or *musette*, playing songs of joy in the open country, when he sees a "child" on a cloud. At the bidding of the child, he pipes first a song about a Lamb,—perhaps the song entitled "The Lamb" is alluded to; and under its inspiration he writes "happy songs" in a book, which "Every child may joy to hear." This introduction is not, strictly speaking, a song; though it is written in a lyrical stanza. It is the allegorical preface to the *Songs of Innocence*. The poem is illustrated in the original frontispiece, which represents Blake as a shepherd-boy dressed in blue, bare-footed, and carrying a shepherd's pipe. Behind him, his flock of woolly sheep are nibbling the grass. He stands between two trees, gazing upwards to a golden-haired cherub who is floating on a cloud with his arms outstretched, as if urging the shepherd-lad to "pipe that song again."

3. a child : cf. Shakespeare, *Macbeth*, I, 7, 21. "And Pity, like a naked new-born babe, striding the blast."
6. with merry cheer : perhaps in the archaic sense, "with a merry face," rather than in the modern, "in a merry mood." Blake spelled the word "cheer" to make it look old-fashioned.
17. a rural pen : a pen apt to tell of rural scenes. "Rural" was one of the stock epithets of the eighteenth century poets. They spoke of the "rural care," meaning the occupation of the shepherd; and it was probably from this association that Blake

derived it. To Blake the word meant not only "rustic," but happy with the innocent happiness of "the shepherd's sweet lot."

18. *stain'd the water clear* : i.e. made ink, or perhaps made the colour-washes with which the poems were illuminated.

## 2. THE ECHOING GREEN.

A little idyll of a village green on a warm afternoon in late spring. Old John, and the mothers sit on the rustic seat around the bole of the old chestnut tree, whilst the happy children engage in such sports as cricket and kite-flying. Then evening comes, and it is time to go home. The merry lilting metre, which rings the changes on two trisyllabic rising feet (anapæsts), is just the right rhythm for expressing innocent happiness and care-free jollity. Note the wonderful effect of the alteration of the refrain from "On the Echoing Green" to "On the darkening Green" in the last stanza. "Darkening!"—what a power of suggestion is in that word! The green not only becomes gloomy; it takes on an eerie and unpleasant aspect in the dusk, when objects seem strange, and imagination invests them with ghostly mystery.

## 3. THE LAMB.

The picture which in the original decorates this poem represents the cherub or "child" of the Introduction speaking to a lamb, whilst the rest of the flock are either grazing or lying down. It is Innocence who asks: "Little Lamb, who made thee?" And Innocence has no doubt about his answer, which identifies the nature of the child and of the lamb with the Creator. Blake imparts a gesture of childhood to his poem by the way in which he enunciates his question, amplifies it, and then enunciates it again in a coda; and similarly by prefacing the answer with "Little Lamb, I'll tell thee." The trochaic movement of a stanza too is very appropriate. The metrical variation produced by the addition of another stressed syllable in the six lines of the verse adds dignity, and, when one considers the significance of the riming words, also weight. The structure of each stanza consists of a theme (2 lines), its exposition (6 lines), and a coda (2 lines). Technically it is a triumph of form, but that one hardly notices, such is the childish beauty of the symbol, and the deep religious feeling which pulses through it.

## 4. THE SHEPHERD.

The picture is once again the blue-clad shepherd-boy of the frontispiece, standing under a pine-tree, crook in hand, watching the grazing of his flock. The poem is a tiny pastoral which celebrates the happiness of "the rural care," the mutual joy of responsibility and trust.

7. He on the one hand is watchful, whilst they on the other hand are in peace.

## 5. INFANT JOY.

A little imaginary dialogue between a baby and a fairy who comes, like the fairy in a fairy-tale, e.g. in "The Sleeping Beauty," to wish it joy.

## 6. THE LITTLE BLACK BOY.

The little black boy has the same human soul, and is just as much one of God's lambs, as the little white boy, says Blake; and the second illustration of the original depicts the Good Shepherd with the little black boy and the little white boy amongst His lambs. Blake wrote this poem just about the time when the "Missions established by the Methodist Society" were first founded in 1787, and the trend of religious thought was turning, under the influence of the Evangelical Revival, towards the preaching of the gospel to the black races. Blake did not realise the difference in the human quality of the soul which difference of race and difference of culture make. Like some of the philosophers of the eighteenth century he regarded savages as noble children of nature; and, believing with Rousseau that "the first impulses of nature are always right," he idealised the black boy perhaps more than he really deserved. At least we may say that the missionaries, who went to Africa and America in search of him, found him neither as innocent nor as lofty in his beliefs as Blake imagined. The metre is the "elegiac stanza" of Gray's *Elegy*, but the regular accent of the verse is not preserved, and the effect is totally different.

8. Note how skilfully Blake passes from a pagan to a Christian conception of God. The god of the black boy is a sun-god, but the children are his lambs.

## 7. LAUGHING SONG.

A little rhapsody for a rural picnic. Note the peculiar iteration of the verb "laugh." The poem illustrates Blake's love of metrical substitution. If we take anapæstic line 6 as the normal line, every line differs from it.

9. **painted** : brightly coloured, gay. "Painted" was one of the stock descriptive epithets of the eighteenth century poets, cf. Somerville's "painted borders of the flood" (*To Mr. Addison*), Garth's "painted Triumphs" (*Dispensary*, V, 3). It was applied to birds by Pope in *Windsor Forest*, 118, where he speaks of the pheasant's "painted wings."

## 8. SPRING.

A little child welcomes the spring, and talks to the lambs. The short verses, each consisting of a foot with two stresses, corresponding to an amphimacer or Cretic foot (— ~ —) give a jerky and rather incoherent effect which is not unlike the prattle of a little child.

## 9. A CRADLE SONG.

A lullaby sung by a mother over her child as it sleeps in the cradle.

It is such a miracle of motherly tenderness and metrical beauty that we can forgive the lapses of strict grammar in "beguiles" (lines 12, 16, and 32) and in "weep" (line 20). The metrical pattern is to be seen in the seventh stanza, which is trochaic; but in most of the stanzas the first and third lines of the quatrain have a long stressed syllable in place of the initial trochees. If we were to write them musically they would be | P | P | P P | P || instead of | P P | P P | P P | P ||

1. **Sweet dreams** : May sweet dreams form a shade, etc.
4. **moony** : descriptive adjectives ending in -y, such as "finny," "briny," "shady" and "sunny," were very much used by eighteenth century poets.
13. One would think that only a mother could so idealize the troubled sleep of an infant. Note the effect of vowel contrast in "moans," "sighs"; "moans," "smiles." The meaning is: May sweet



moans and dovelike sighs chase not slumber from thine eyes.  
May sweet moans and sweeter smiles beguile all the dovelike  
moans.

20. **weep** : Perhaps we might take this as a subjunctive form.
27. May thou ever see His image, His heavenly face that smiles on thee.
31. Infant smiles are His own smiles, which beguile heaven and earth to peace. A recollection, I think, of the first Christmas and the angels' song; and a thought which is similar to Plato's doctrine of life and death in the *Phaedo*. Children are little angels because they still retain their angelic nature, cf. Vaughan, *The Retreat*.

#### 10. NURSE'S SONG, I.

A little ballad about bedtime, and a companion in subject-matter to "The Echoing Green." The children are playing on the green, and the Nurse (like the Shepherd) finds happiness in her care. She calls the children to come home, but when they say "Just a little longer, Nurse," she has not the heart to refuse them. Note the skilful use of internal rime in this poem.

#### 11. HOLY THURSDAY, I.

A ballad of one of the Charity Schools' Anniversaries, or annual services for the children from the various Charity Schools, which were held in London in unbroken succession from 1704 to 1877. From 1738 to 1781 the Anniversary of the Charity Schools was celebrated at Christ Church, Newgate Street; but in 1782 the service was held for the first time in St. Paul's. These services were arranged by the Society of Patrons of the Anniversary of Charity Schools, which received the help of a contribution of £50 from the Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge, from which the Society of Patrons had originally sprung. See Allen and McClure, *Two Hundred Years, the History of the S.P.C.K.*, (1698-1898), ch. IV, pp. 144-150.

The poem was evidently written between 1782, the date of the first Anniversary in St. Paul's, and 1784(?), the date of composition of *An Island in the Moon*, for the first draft of *Holy Thursday* is in that manuscript, in the Fitzwilliam Museum. The design of the poem in *Songs of Innocence* is like a sampler. At the head over

the title, HOLY THURSDAY, the boys walk two and two, preceded by two beadles. At the foot, the girls in caps and aprons walk in pairs behind one matron. Blake recollects, or imagines, the sight of the vast cathedral crowded with little children, and the sight touched his pity. He was not the only one to be moved, though he gives the Anniversaries their finest memorial,—these Anniversaries greatly impressed the philanthropic minds of eighteenth century London. The charity schools, the forerunners of the elementary schools of the nineteenth century, were founded by the S.P.C.K. and multiplied during the eighteenth century, to educate “poor children . . . in the principles of religion as well as of civil life.” This private form of benevolence provided the children with a distinctive uniform, and taught them the catechism and the three Rs.; but it was feared by many that even this slight schooling would imperil the social order. The Charity Schools were attacked by Bernard Mandeville in an *Essay on Charity and Charity Schools*, 1723. They were, he said, a luxury which the country could not afford. They encouraged idleness in the poor, and diminished the number of uneducated and unskilled labourers. And who he asks will do “the dirty slavish work,” if all the children of the poor are educated? We need not suppose that Blake is here engaging in the great charity schools’ controversy, or that he is giving poetic form to Bishop Butler’s sermons on benevolence. He was simply moved to pity by the multitudes of innocent, ignorant children in their distinctive uniforms of “red and blue and green”; and probably he found much the same thrilling satisfaction, at the time this poem was written, as the musician Handel had found in the children of the Foundling Hospital.

Holy or “Maundy” Thursday was an appropriate day for the service which Blake describes, because of its associations. It was on the first Holy Thursday that Our Lord washed the feet of his disciples (*S. John*, xiii), and following the “mandate” which He then gave—“ye also ought to wash one another’s feet”—popes and kings rivalled each other through the middle ages in washing the feet of poor people and in giving alms on Maundy Thursday.

2. **in red and blue and green** : These were the colours which Blake used to tint the prints produced by his process of “Illuminated Printing.” Here they refer to the uniforms of the children.
8. This line in the first draft (*An Island in the Moon*, ch. xi) appeared as : “And all in order sit waiting the chief chanter’s commands.” The revision is magnificent. To my mind it is the perfection of the picture suggested in the first stanza.

Thousands of little boys and girls : The average number was between four and five thousand.

raising their innocent hands : i.e. in the attitude of prayer.

11. wise guardians of the poor : Not the poor-law guardians of Gilbert's Act of 1782, much less the Boards of Guardians of the Act of 1834, but simply the governors or patrons of the Charity Schools.
12. Then cherish pity, lest, in hardening your heart, you drive a child from your door. Children were regarded as "angels" by Blake, because the child still preserves the unfallen and unwounded spirit of goodness, cf. *The Four Zoas*, Night II, l. 574, "For the Source of Life descends to be a weeping babe." There is also a reminiscence of *Hebrews* xiii, 2, "Be not forgetful to entertain strangers, for thereby some have entertained angels unawares." The last two lines were an afterthought. In the first draft Blake finished the poem with these lines :

" When the whole multitude of innocents their voices raise  
Like angels on the throne of heav'n, raising the voice of praise."

## 12. THE BLOSSOM.

The decoration to this poem represents a tree of the flame of divine love, on a branch of which sits an angel. Smaller sprites sport around her. One, which presumably represents the merry Sparrow, flies joyfully towards her; whilst another, perhaps the pretty Robin, crouches near the angel as if in grief. It is difficult to see clearly whether the angel is nursing a baby, or whether the angel is really a fairy. This is one of Blake's "mad songs," and I make no attempt to interpret it. The rime "sobbing"—"robin" seems to indicate that, like most people in the eighteenth century, Blake said "sobbin'."

## 13. THE CHIMNEY-SWEEPER, I.

In Blake's age in England little boys were commonly employed by master-sweeps for sweeping chimneys. Many of the chimneys had originally been built with a wide draught for wood fires, and had been rebuilt and narrowed so that coal fires could be used. Others were built with angular flues to check back draughts and "smoking." It was found by experience that the most efficient way of cleaning them was to send up a boy armed with a brush.

Readers of Charles Kingsley's *Water Babies*, will remember the story of Tom and Mr. Grimes. The employment of boys led to grave abuses. Some were pauper-children, "apprenticed" by the guardians, who were glad to be rid of them. Others were actually sold to the sweeps by inhuman parents for a few pounds. Others, again, were the children of master-sweeps. The work was physically hard. They had to climb chimneys, using their hands and knees as do rock-climbers. They became bruised, torn, and ingrained with soot. Moreover the work was dangerous. It was not an unknown mishap for boys to be choked by a fall of soot, or suffocated by the smoke from a communicating flue. The practice of using boys became such a public scandal that sympathizers with the boys repeatedly introduced bills into parliament to improve the conditions of their service. The first bill became law in 1788. "Porter's Act" as it was known, from Mr. David Porter, the benevolent master-sweep of Little Welbeck Street who promoted it, limited the hours of work to the morning; and prohibited the employment of boys under eight. It was not until after a long struggle that finally, in 1842, an Act was passed which raised the age of apprenticeship to sixteen, and permitted no child under the age of twenty-one to enter a chimney.

The little chimney-sweeps had many philanthropic friends, and lovers of Lamb's essay "The Praise of Chimney-Sweepers," which should be read together with Blake's poem, will remember that his friend Jem White gave them a supper every year during St. Bartholomew's Fair. Blake's sympathy is evident, but the only bettering in the lot of the little chimney-sweeper which he suggests is heaven. We might add that Porter's Act provided that master-sweeps should cause their apprentices to be well washed at least once a week, and should send them to church on Sundays,—the latter provision ensured that the weekly bath was really carried out.

The poem succeeds, in spite of its halting scansion, by its imaginative quality. Lamb thought very highly of it. He praised it to Bernard Barton, and in 1824, when James Montgomery, the Sheffield poet, was publishing *The Chimney-Sweeper's Friend, and Climbing-Boy's Annual*, with illustrations by Robert Cruikshank, he contributed a copy of this poem for the "climbing-boys" to read and enjoy.

2. **sold me** : The sums varied from two to eight guineas. The smaller the boy, the higher the price.
3. **'weep ! 'weep !** : Boys advertised their master by parading the streets carrying a brush and crying "Sweep ! sweep !" Lamb alludes to "their little professional notes sounding like the *peep-peep* of a young sparrow."

4. **in soot I sleep** : " They slept almost invariably, with the soot, in a cellar : sometimes on bags of soot, with another bag to cover them : sometimes on straw, and occasionally on a mattress." (J. L. and B. Hammond, *The Town Labourer*, 1760-1832, Ch. ix). But we must remember that, for all, life was harder in those days, and most apprentices slept under the counter.
5. **when his head . . . was shav'd** : Their heads were shaved for cleanliness, and as a precaution against burning if the soot in the chimney became on fire. Sometimes boys were sent to extinguish a chimney on fire, and occasionally they might lose their way in the flues and blunder into one, below which a fire was burning.
12. **coffins of black** : Is this just a dream ? Or do the " coffins " symbolize the sooty bodies in which their young souls were confined ? If the latter, the " Angel " of line 13 will be the Angel of Death, who " open'd the coffins " and released their souls.
21. **we rose in the dark** : They began operations at 7 a.m. in winter, and 5 a.m. in summer.
24. Is this line irony ? Or is Blake descending to the level of the child, and advocating the conventional morality which he hated ? Perhaps the best interpretation is his proverb : " In seed time learn, in harvest teach, in winter enjoy."

time planting seed  
 Capt that rises (masonry) columns  
 development

#### 14. THE DIVINE IMAGE, I.

^ To Blake, God is the living spirit of Mercy, Pity, Peace, and Love, the perpetual source of forgiveness. The emblem which illuminates the poem represents, at the foot, God raising fallen man and woman ; and from these figures rises a tree of the flame of divine love which curls and rises to the top of the page where angels guard two praying figures. Men pray to God, says Blake, as the spirit of Mercy, Pity, Peace, and Love ; but these eternal forms are also the divine ideas of the noblest attributes of man, and in knowing these virtues, man becomes a manifestation of God. This leads him to the thought which he expresses in " The Little Black Boy,"—that the human form and soul is the same in the heathen, " Turk or Jew," as in the white Christian ; and when they show Mercy and Love, " there God is dwelling too." This poem is a triumph of argument in lyrical form, and is moreover most regular in metre.

## 15. NIGHT.

Two pictures accompany this poem. The first is a night scene by moonlight with angels visiting the earth. In the second, radiant human forms walk as in a garden by night. The meaning, if there be any beyond the obvious, eludes me. Nor is Blake's grammar at its best in this poem. Yet the first three stanzas are very beautiful.

26. **They** : The angels.

27. **thirst** : blood-thirst, savage cruelty.

29. **they** : the animals of prey.

31. **each mild spirit** : the animals of prey who, under the influence of the angels, have become mild,—like the lion in the next stanza. The teaching being that, under the influence of "Mercy, Pity, Peace, and Love," wrath and sickness of mind are banished from the place where angels wander.

## 16. A DREAM.

A curious dream written in trochaic couplets with four alternate stresses. It has an interest all its own from the fact that Blake could make an Emmet the heroine of a poem for children. Such poems were not unknown in the nineteenth century, but Blake was one of the first to find pathos in the troubles of an ant.

1. **shade** : an insubstantial thing, a vision.

3. **Emmet** : ant : O.E. *æmete*.

5. 'wilder'd : bewildered.

## 17. ON ANOTHER'S SORROW.

A lyric which is very characteristic of Blake, firstly, for its teaching, that pity is both human and divine ; secondly, for its trochaic movement ; and thirdly, for its arrangement of questions in a climax as in *The Tiger*. It follows "A Dream" naturally, as it is written in the same metre, and its thought is such reflection

as might arise from a consideration of Blake's pity for the lost emmet. Indeed it seems to be a sequel to "A Dream," which it follows in all the copies of the *Songs of Innocence*, though some of the songs were varied in their order.

# 18-19. I. THE LITTLE BOY LOST. II. THE LITTLE BOY FOUND.

A half-formed ballad of how a little boy wandered from his father to follow a Will o' the Wisp,—which is shown in the original illustration. He follows it and becomes lost in the fen; but God appeared in the shape of his father and led him home again. The poem may be an allegory of God searching for His own; though they wander from Him, like Francis Thompson's *Hound of Heaven*; or,—like Goethe's *Erlkönig*,—it may be simply a romantic tale. In the *Erlkönig* a father is riding through the forest with his little boy in his arms, when the son sees the *Erlkönig*, the fairy king, who beckons the child to come to him, and sings him songs that promise him all the joys of fairyland. The child is terrified and appeals to his father, but the father can see nothing but the mist. The boy's last words are "Father, father, he is taking hold of me! The fairy king has hurt me!" The father is seized with fear, and gallops home holding the groaning child; but when he dismounts and looks at him, the child is dead. Goethe's *Erlkönig* was published in 1782, and Blake may have heard of it, for it was very popular. Blake's broken narrative with its snatch of dialogue, and the awe of mystery and night in "The Little Boy Lost," are like the *Erlkönig* in miniature, without its magic, and without its music. The poem was first written in Blake's unpublished MS. entitled *An Island in the Moon*, which was probably composed about 1784, so that literary influence, though doubtful, is not impossible. The sequel, "The Little Boy Found," reveals Blake's love of a happy ending. His tenderness of heart, his reverence for mercy, pity, and love, unfitted him for the unhappiness of the tragic ending, cf. "The Little Girl Lost." He could sing of cruelty and misery as evils of law and opinion under which men, he believed, suffered; but he had not the heart to injure a child, even an imaginary child of fiction.

## SONGS OF EXPERIENCE

## 1. INTRODUCTION.

The frontispiece to the *Songs of Experience* represents the shepherd of the frontispiece to the *Songs of Innocence* once again with his flock ; but he has put away his *musette*, and now bears the burden of the cherub seated upon his head. This, the first poem, is the first evidence of the change of Blake's attitude. He is no longer a shepherd boy piping "a song about a lamb." He is a visionary and inspired bard calling Earth to rise and free itself from its chains. The spirit of the poem is the same, though the passion is not so intense, as in Blake's lyric (in *Milton*) "And did those feet in ancient time."

6. **Calling** : qualifies "the voice of the Bard." Hear the voice of the Bard calling the lapsed soul.
6. **lapsed** : fallen,—because it follows the outward light of law and duty, instead of the inward light of "imagination" or divine illumination ; Lat. *lapsare*, to slip, fall.
8. **That** : which, referring to "the voice of the Bard."

## 2. EARTH'S ANSWER.

This poem, in a series of irregular stanzas, is the answer of Earth to the call of the Bard. Earth says she is in bondage to a jealous God, a God of fear ; and calls to the Bard to break the chain which imprisons Love. Possibly Blake had in mind such a Hebraic conception of God as was taught by the harsher doctors or theology ; that God is a jealous God : that man's duty is to fear Him : that Christian ethics are satisfactorily represented, as in the Catechism and *The Whole Duty of Man*, by a series of duties or obligations. This conventional view of morality Blake regarded as a work of evil. To him the prime facts of religion were that God is Love, that the best virtue is forgiveness, and the only religious experience is the inner life of the soul's vision.



7. **Starry jealousy** : Note the power of the epithet,—cold, distant, in darkness.
13. Can the virgins of the morning of youth enjoy delight when it is chained in darkness. The original arrangement of rime is not kept in this and in the next stanza.

### 3. NURSE'S SONG, II.

The illustration depicts not the white capped nurse of the first "Nurse's Song," but a young and rather stern-looking governess who is scolding a sad-looking boy with long hair. Some will regard this poem simply as the expression of disillusion at the unfulfilment of life's promises. It may be so. But I cannot help contrasting this poem with the earlier "Nurse's Song," and thinking of Blake's saying to Crabb Robinson : "There is no use in education. I hold it wrong." This conscientious and dutiful Nurse is a very proper person, who thinks that children waste precious hours in playing and in acting charades, when they might be occupied with their duties, or engaged in improving their minds ; and when she thinks of the "shocking" things which she was tempted to do in her youth, before she learned to be reasonable and earnest, her face "turns green and pale" with horror. It is pure irony, and shows that Blake might have been a satirist, if he had chosen to laugh at the errors which he condemned ; but he preferred the prophet's mantle. This disciplinary Nurse is a complete contrast to the kindly, yielding soul of the "Nurse's Song" in the *Songs of Innocence*. I am sure she was always quoting Dr. Watts ; and I am quite sure she read Hannah More's *Essays on Various Subjects* (1777), dedicated to one whom Blake had met at Mrs. Mathew's "blue-stocking" *salon*, 1782-4, namely Mrs. Montague. In her essay "On Education," Hannah More says : "One would be led to imagine, by the common mode of female education, that human life consisted of one universal holiday, and that the only contest was, who should be best enabled to excel in the sports and games that were to be celebrated on it. Merely ornamental accomplishments will but indifferently qualify a woman to perform the *duties* of life," etc., etc. As the "Spectator" once remarked : "Much might be said on both sides."

8. **disguise** : not only "dressing up" in other clothes and masks, but with the Tudor meaning of mummery, acting. "Guisers," in Elizabethan English, was another word for mummers ; and hence

"guiser," or geezer, is still a local term of abuse for an overdressed woman. On the other hand, if the poem is simply an expression of disillusion, "disguise" must mean deception, and the meaning would be: Life is vain. Youth wastes its hours in meaningless play. Age spends its time in pretending to be what it is not.

#### 4. THE FLY.

Thoughts arising from the killing of a fly. The first draft (in the *Rossetti MS.*) began

"Woe! alas! my guilty hand  
Brush'd across thy summer joy;  
All thy gilded painted pride  
Shatter'd, fled." . . .

Then Blake crossed out this, and began our poem. It is, in its moralizing sentiment, similar to Burns's *To a Mouse* (Nov., 1785), and *To a Mountain Daisy* (April, 1786), but much more delicate and mystical; and the moral which Blake extracts is that man is like a fly, not only because his life is short, or because he is powerless against Fate; but because the fly, like man, enjoys life and possesses thought. Mr. Edwin J. Ellis in his "Introduction" to his facsimile edition of *The Songs of Innocence and of Experience* (1893) illustrates from Blake's *Milton*, p. 18, l. 27,

"Seest thou the little winged fly, smaller than a grain of sand  
It has a heart like thee, a brain open to heaven and hell.  
Withinside wondrous and expansive. Its gates are not closed.  
I hope thine are not."

#### 5. THE TIGER.

The companion poem to "The Lamb." To the mind in the state of innocence the Lamb appears to be a fit symbol of life, mild, innocent, and beautiful. To the mind which has experienced the disappointments and the sorrows and the injustices of life, its symbol is the Tiger, relentless, strong, remorseless,—and beautiful. This is the most famous and the most impressive poem of Blake's. Its strength depends partly on the most effective use of the rhetorical question,—the question which is

not meant to be answered aloud ; partly on the effect of certain words—"burning," "fearful," "dread," "dare"—and partly on the magnificent climax, culminating in stanza five. Blake almost disdained the use of epithet in this poem, and succeeds not by colour, but by the use of strong naked outline. The diction is almost monosyllabic, and the trochaic movement, freely used, has a dignity here which it usually lacks in English, even when the line ends in an accented monosyllable. Alliteration is most effectively used to emphasize metrical accent.

The poem seems so artless that one would be tempted to call it a lucky stroke of genius, if one did not know that it was the product of much thoughtful revision. The first draft of the poem is in the Rossetti MS. ; and Blake's editor, Dr. John Sampson, prints it in full in the Oxford Edition of *Blake's Poetical Works*, p. 87. Far from being artless, the poem is a triumph of conscious artistry.

Blake spelled it "Tyger."

**Could :** Blake hovered between "could" and "dare." Finally he kept "dare" for the last line. A cunning stroke !

10. **twist :** an image from anatomy. When the skin is flayed, the muscles show below like twists.

**Sinews :** muscles,—a frequent use of the word in the plural ; but, strictly speaking, sinews are the fibrous tissues which unite the muscles to the bones.

12. This line was originally written as part of a longer sentence :

" What dread hand, and what dread feet,  
Could fetch it from the furnace deep ? "

and another stanza should have followed. But Blake was dissatisfied with it, and turned line 12 into a parallel line to l. 13. That the Tiger was thought of as being founded in a furnace is apparent from line 14.

13. **what :** Blake thought of writing "where," but retained "what."

17. **stars :** angels, cf. *Job*, xxxviii, 7, "When the morning stars sang together."

18. **with their tears :** They threw down their spears in amazement, and wept to see such a merciless being created.

19. **smile** : Blake hovered between "did he laugh" and "dare he smile." He chose "smile," I think, because "smile" is associated with pleasure, but "laugh" with derision or scorn. The tiger is pleasing to God, because the tiger is part of His purpose and pleasure.
20. This line links the poem to "The Lamb" in *Songs of Innocence*. It was the Christ who made the lamb. Was it He, Blake asks, who created the tiger? Or was it the Jehovah of the Hebrews? whom Blake called Urizen. Blake hated the Hebraic conception of God as a jealous tyrant and lawgiver, who demands fear, and commands "Thou shalt not."
24. **frame** : Blake first wrote "form," and then rejected it in favour of "frame."

## 6-7. I. THE LITTLE GIRL LOST. II. THE LITTLE GIRL FOUND.

These poems are counterparts of the concluding poems of *Songs of Innocence*, "The Little Boy Lost" and "The Little Boy Found." I do not think it has been pointed out before that the first two stanzas are, in the original, written in a slightly different script from the rest, and are separated by the decoration, like the first stanza of the other poem entitled "A Little Girl Lost." I therefore print them in italics. They form an interpretation of the allegory which follows in the story of Lyca lost and found. Lyca's parents lose her and bemoan her loss; but Lyca is safe amongst the beasts of prey, and when her parents at last find her, they all live happily together, as in the golden age, amongst the beasts whom they had dreaded. The allegory may have several meanings. I hesitate to rationalize a story which bears its own significance in its charming fiction.

- II. 36. **A spirit** : cf. "the vision," line 46. A clear indication that the poems are an allegory.

## 8. THE CLOD AND THE PEBBLE.

There are two kinds of love, the one, gentle and self-sacrificing, loving others; the other, ruthless and selfish, loving only self and

exploiting others. Blake illustrates this from the clod and pebble. The clod is trodden beneath the feet of the cattle who, in the illustration of the original edition, come to drink of the brook. The pebble is individual, clean-washed, and polished. The poem is a little fable which bears its own "moral."

8. **these metres meet** : these apt verses.

11. **Joys in** : enjoys.

### 9. THE LITTLE VAGABOND.

A short satirical poem, setting forth the gipsy-boy's opinion of the church, and perhaps Blake's also.

4. **Such usage** : namely, the church's coldness.

### 10. HOLY THURSDAY, II.

This sequel to the earlier "Holy Thursday" is not only a song of experience, it is a song of revolution. The poem probably belongs to 1791-2, when Blake was frequenting the revolutionary circle which met at "Bookseller" Johnson's house, 72 St. Paul's Churchyard, and when he was writing his rare and curious prose poem *The French Revolution*. Here he met the British Jacobins, —the famous Dr. Price who stimulated Burke to write his *Reflections on the French Revolution*; Godwin the author of *Political Justice*, which inspired Shelley; Tom Paine, the author of *The Rights of Man*; Mary Wollstonecraft, the author of *The Rights of Women*, whose *Original Stories* for children Blake illustrated; Holcroft the dramatist, and others. Blake said the shape of his forehead made him a republican. He is said to have worn the red cap of liberty in the streets, and it is interesting to remember that, in January 1804, Blake was tried at Chichester for uttering seditious and treasonable language to a soldier whom he had pushed out of his garden at Felpham.

The picture to which attention is called in this poem is the state of the charity-school children. Why are these poor children? Is this state of things right? In the illustration of the original poem a female figure is looking at a naked babe who is exposed in open country. Blake's attitude is different from his earlier sense of

pity in the first "Holy Thursday." Now he feels a sense of indignant shame. Why should there be charity schools in a rich land? "Why should children accept a wretched schooling, as a privilege, and a wretched uniform as a charity? "This ought not to be." That is the revolutionary message which he sings, and the rhetorical questions of lines 1 and 5 are very characteristic of Blake.

Conventional morality praised public charity, and Blake satirized it in *The Four Zoas*, Night VII, lines 109-29 (Oxford *Blake*, p. 358). Urizen, the Hebrew God of Fear and Law, speaks:

"Compel the Poor to live upon a crust of bread by soft mild arts :  
So shall [you] govern over all. Let Moral Duty tune your tongue. . . .  
And when his children sicken, let them die :—there are enough  
Born, even too many, and our earth will soon be overrun  
Without these arts. If you would make the Poor live with temper,  
With pomp give every crust of bread you give ; with gracious cunning  
Magnify small gifts ; reduce the man to want a gift, and then give with pomp."

If any proof were wanted that Blake constantly used irony and satire, it is here. He is more than satirical. He is bitter, with the class-conscious hate of the revolutionist. It is necessary to remember that, as yet, a national provision of schools in every parish and township was only an ideal, and the charity schools were the best endeavour of the age. Moreover the industrial revolution was unsettling the social order by creating new and irregular demands for labour, and by making some small classes of masters rich quickly. At least we may say that the sting of Blake's poem is now drawn. Children are no longer "fed with cold and usurous hand" of private benevolence.

4. The children of the charity-schools, which were the only organised elementary schools of the age, were not I think *fed* literally. They were not boarders. They went daily, as their descendants now go, to the National and Council Schools ; but they did receive a school uniform, consisting of a cap, coat, stockings and shoes for boys, and a white cap, gown, stockings, gloves and shoes for the girls.

5. trembling cry : cf. "Holy Thursday," I, lines 9, 10.

## II. A POISON TREE.

The first stanza of this poem was originally an epigram, which Blake expanded, by the introduction of the fiction of the poisoned

apple slaying the friend, into the present poem. Its original title "Christian Forbearance" shows that it is a fable directed against self-restraint. Blake believed that it was wrong to thwart natural impulse. Anger, restrained, produces the apple of hate which finally destroys friendship.

## 12. THE ANGEL.

A variation in Blake's own style upon the theme of Herrick's little poem "To the Virgins, to make much of time."

"Gather ye Rosebuds while ye may,  
Old Time is still a-flying :  
And this same flower that smiles to-day,  
To-morrow will be dying."

The illustration represents a young queen attended by a winged Cupid, who seeks in vain to attract her attention away from her evident propriety.

4. My senseless grief was never charmed or diverted from its mood of sorrow.

## 13. THE SICK ROSE.

An epigram on "the worm in the bud"; cf. Shakespeare, *Twelfth Night*, II, 4, 112 :

"She never told her love,  
But let Concealment, like a worm i' the bud,  
Feed on her damask cheek : she pined in thought."

The meaning of Blake's poem is perhaps explained by "My Pretty Rose-Tree."

## 14. TO TIRZAH.

This poem was not composed when the *Songs of Experience* were first printed in 1794. It was however included in later copies of the work. It is dated by Dr. Sampson *circa* 1801-3. The thought is expressed in the mystical language of the prophetic books. "Tirzah" is Blake's name for Earth and the religion of Nature.

2. cf. 1 *Corinthians*, xv., 35-50. "That which thou sowest, is not quickened except it die."
4. **with thee** : with Earth, with mortality.
6. **Blow'd** : flowered, bloomed.
9. **Mother** : Mother Earth.
15. Professor Raleigh illustrates from Blake's notes *For the Year 1810* : "All things are comprehended in their eternal forms in the divine body of the Saviour, . . . who appeared to me as . . . throwing off the temporal that the eternal might be established." We might quote another aphorism from a tract "printed" by Blake in 1788 : "God becomes as we are, that we may be as He is."
16. **with thee** : with Earth, with mortality. The motto, inscribed on the robe of a prophetic figure who, in the illustration, is presenting water to a dead man, is from 1 *Corinthians*, xv, 44.

### 15. THE VOICE OF THE ANCIENT BARD.

Originally one of the *Songs of Innocence*. A little ode celebrating the triumph of Truth.

10. And feel they know not anything except care.

### 16. MY PRETTY ROSE-TREE.

This and the next two short poems were engraved on one plate. This little symbol of jealousy tells why "The Sick Rose" was sick.

### 17. AH, SUN-FLOWER !

A little poem which is so beautiful in image and rhythm that its meaning scarcely matters. Mr. Ellis says : "The Sun-flower repeats the craving of youth, and sighs for its satisfaction in eternity, where the sun, the traveller of time, ends his journey."



## 18. THE LILY.

lost innocent and beautiful things, says Blake, have one defect which mars their perfection ; but the Lily is perfect beauty and perfect meekness, and is therefore the perfect symbol of love.

## 19. THE GARDEN OF LOVE.

Another allegory satirical of the church, cf. "The Little Vagabond."

Like most theosophical mystics, and like all extreme individualists, Blake had little sympathy with the church as an organized human society, or with religion as a system of morality. He did not feel the need of it himself, and could not understand why other people did. Indeed Blake was unfitted by temperament either to feel the need or the satisfaction of human society. He believed in a revealed, not in "natural" religion ; but it was his own private revelation.

## 20. A LITTLE BOY LOST.

This rather obscure poem is by no means the best of the *Songs*. Indeed it is not a song, but a satirical fable. The first two stanzas are, I think, the comment of the boy on the moral instruction of the Catechism in answer to the question : "What is thy duty towards thy Neighbour ?" which, it will be remembered says, "My duty towards my Neighbour is to love him as myself," etc. The Priest overhears this heresy against the moral law of duty, and punishes his offence with death. The unwritten implication is : But if the Church punishes the child for not understanding his father's love, how shall the God of the Church punish the Church for not understanding Him ?

The boy contends that the human mind only knows itself, and can only know others in terms of itself ; and he makes the obvious logical deduction.

1. Note the irony of this line.

2. This rhetorical question is poor, I think, because the answer is so

obviously in the negative. Blake's first inspiration was "Such things are done," etc.

## 21. INFANT SORROW.

This short poem is only a part of a longer allegorical poem (Oxford *Blake*, p. 115), of which it forms the first two stanzas. As it stands here it is a complaint of one in revolt against human life. It lives, I think, by the daring image of line 4.

2. dangerous : perilous, but perhaps associated also with the earlier meaning,—having dominion, domineering.
4. Cf. the "Mad Song" in *Poetical Sketches*, 1783, "Like a fiend in a cloud, With howling woe," etc.

## 22. THE SCHOOLBOY.

This song originally was one of the *Songs of Innocence*. It illustrates Blake's views on schooling: "There is no use in education. I hold it wrong." It needs no comment, and scarcely deserves criticism. The addition of the final line to the stanza is a little feat of riming, but it fails to add to the rhythmical beauty of the quatrain. Blake handles his metrical pattern with a fine sense of variation, and with full realisation of the beauty which variety offers.

8. a cruel eye outworn : worn out under the cruel eye of the teacher. We might ask again : "Are such things done on Albion's shore?"
15. the dreary shower : the shower of dreary words.
19. But : do otherwise than.

## 23. LONDON.

This restrained and powerful poem is the utterance of one who sees the imperfections of human society and feels intensely its sorrows.

The illustration which accompanies it in the original represents a crippled beggar (or perhaps a lame prophet) led by a child. The three great evils over which Blake laments are *cruelty*, typified by the sweep's boy, who is a reproach to the church; *war*, typified by the soldier, who is a reproach to the palace; and *lust*, which threatens the purity of marriage and the happiness of children.

**charter'd** : free, privileged, as if invested with rights by royal charter.

**ban** : prohibition, restriction.

**the mind-forg'd manacles** : The manacles or fetters which the mind of authority has made, that is, the effect of the civil and moral law; cf. Blake's "proverb"—"Prisons are built with stones of Law. Brothels with bricks of Religion."

**the chimney-sweeper's cry** : See note on "The Chimney Sweeper," I.

**black'ning** : because, according to Blake's view, it 'blackens' the soul.

**blights** : Blake wrote "hangs," then improved upon it with "smites," and lastly "blights."

**the marriage hearse** : the hearse of conjugal love.

#### 24. A LITTLE GIRL LOST.

The poem concerning those "whisperings in the dale" which made the face of the Nurse turn "green and pale," and now shock the father of Ona. Like the other poem entitled "The Little Girl Lost," p. 27, it is an allegory, set in the Golden Age.

#### 25. THE CHIMNEY-SWEEPER, II.

ampson says: "The original draft of this song in the *Rossette MS.* shows that Blake at first intended the second and third stanzas to form a poem complete in itself. The first stanza and title were an afterthought, written in pencil upon a different page." As it

stands, it is the companion poem to 'The Chimney-Sweeper' of *Songs of Innocence*, and a bitter indictment of the condition of the "climbing-boys."

"How the chimney-sweeper's cry  
Every black'ning church appalls!"

For the story of their conditions, see the note on the earlier poem. The illustration to the original in *Songs of Experience* represents a sweep's boy, black with soot, walking the street in driving snow and sleet, carrying a brush in his right hand and a sack of soot on his left shoulder. Note how the hobbling metre with its 'anapæsts' suits the march of the boy through the snow.

2. Crying 'weep ! 'weep !' : See note on "The Chimney-Sweeper," I, line 3.
7. clothes of death : in black, i.e. in sooty clothes.
8. the notes of woe : 'weep ! 'weep ! i.e. to call "Sweep ! Sweep !" —the street-cry of the sweeps.
10. They only see the happiness of the individual. They cannot see the iniquity of compelling children to such slavery.
11. ~~the priest and king~~ priest and king : The representatives of the moral and civil law, the favourite bugbears of revolutionists in the period of the French Revolution,—and of Blake.
12. Blake's first thought was: "Who wrap themselves up in our misery." Perhaps the meaning of his afterthought is therefore: Who make for themselves a state of wealth and ease based upon our misery.

## 26. THE HUMAN ABSTRACT.

This poem is very characteristic of eighteenth century thought in its suggestion that morality is a natural human product, and has no divine origin. The Deists held this view, but they believed in the utility of morality. Here Blake differed. He knew no morality except natural impulse. Pity, Mercy and Peace could not exist,

he says, without poverty, unhappiness, and fear. Peace leads to selfishness and cruelty, and from the fear of a cruel mind rises the root of Humility which grows into the tree of Mystery, or the moral law. Blake, of course, was no Deist. He attacked their rational "natural religion" constantly. But probably he never realised how near were the premises of his intuitive faith to their "natural religion."

Blake overlooks the fact that pity is an emotion aroused by tragedy; Poverty is not an essential factor of pity.

Mercy does not spring from superior happiness, but from superior power. You can only show mercy to one who is in your power.

So also said Thomas Hobbes in *Leviathan* (1651), but it would be a poor world, if our ideal of peace were a stalemate of warriors worn out with conflict.

He : Cruelty becomes remorseful, and weeps.

shade : figurative for "tree," cf. line 22.

the fruit of Deceit : figurative for what Blake regarded as the false morality of "the Mystery," namely the prescriptive virtues.

The moral law, says Blake, is not a revelation. It is merely an invention of human reason. His first version of this line was : "Till they sought in the human brain." Blake's meaning may be seen from Hobbes's words,— "For these words of Good, Evil, and Contemptible are ever used with relation to the person that useth them : there being nothing simply and absolutely so ; nor any common Rule of Good and Evil to be taken from the nature of the objects themselves." (*Leviathan*, Ch. 6).

## 27. A DIVINE IMAGE, II.

This song is found only in one copy of the poems, that in the Reading Room of the British Museum ; and as the watermark of the paper is dated 1832, it must have been printed from Blake's engraving after his death. It was not included in any of the copies issued by Blake himself. It is the comment of "experience" on "The

Divine Image" in *Songs of Innocence*. The evil attributes cruelty, jealousy, terror, and secrecy,—he says, are hurtful. And the implication is that man, created, we are told, in "image of God," bears some imperfections which belong rather to the nature of man than to the pure idea of God, unless we dare invest God with these human imperfections.



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